

The importance of play

According to Brock *et al.* (2013), children naturally engage in play, and so, children's play should be included in educational activities to drive learning and fulfil the educational ideal.

Correspondingly, Herrington and Brussoni (2015) maintain that play is critical to childhood development, having been recognised as a fundamental right of children by the United Nations Convention. Moreover, the unstructured game has no enforced rules; it is spontaneous and started by children, without adult intervention or preparation. Similarly, Shree and Shukla (2016) consider that play is crucial for children's growth and development. Additionally, children learn to solve problems, interact with others, and develop the fine and gross motor skills necessary for growth and learning via play. Therefore, the advantages of play and the developmental areas influenced by play are many in a typically developing child.

Furthermore, Wood and Bennet (1997) recognise that play's relevance is supported by various psychological theories, ideologies, and educational approaches from many times and civilizations. They imply widespread agreement that young children need play to learn about themselves, their cultures, responsibilities, and relationships.

In 1920, **Sigmund Freud** published the seminal essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he outlined his psychoanalytic theory of play. According to Freud's idea, play serves as a method for repeatedly working through painful situations from the past to develop control over them. Freud interpreted this repetition as a child's way of relieving everyday stress or the pleasure principle. Subsequently, the pleasure principle, of which play is a significant component, is superseded by the reality principle, when children's innate desires are replaced by the capacity to think (Brown and Patte, 2013). Later, in 1925, his daughter, **Anna Freud**, pioneered another psychological play study. She investigated how play aided children in developing the capacity to cope with the reality of different sorts of trauma (e.g., war, family separation) (Bergen, 2015).

Erik Erikson (1963, 1977), who studied at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute alongside Anna Freud, highlighted the significance of the "Play Age" (three to six years). Through this period, children assume the roles of fictitious solid characters (e.g., superheroes) or influential adults in their lives (e.g., doctors). Children, he said, get exposure to these adults'

leadership and power positions via these roles. Additionally, they develop block-construction "worlds" in which they may resolve behavioural and emotional difficulties encountered in the "real world." Erikson reported on his studies with children who used their block structures to express key emotional themes in their life. His and Freud's work led many people to examine the therapeutic potential of play (Bergen, 2015).

Jean Piaget (1945, 1965) watched children's play from infancy to school age and characterised the most common forms of play at each age level, which significantly affected psychologists' research into how play develops in childhood. Piaget postulated phases of play development and speculated about their significance as developmental constructs based on his observations of his own children's play in infancy (1945) and his research of older boys' marble gameplay (1965).

According to Piaget (1962), play and cognitive development are strongly intertwined.

During play, children use all their senses. That, according to Piaget, permits children to integrate new knowledge. This information is stored alongside existing concepts until something changes, i.e., until new information is integrated that appears to contradict or puts into question this established knowledge. This distress or cognitive disequilibrium encourages children to reconsider the concept they had acquired (Pound, 2005).

Moreover, the emphasis that practitioners make on providing resource-rich play spaces and abundant opportunities for children to explore as they choose reflects Piaget's emphasis on the child's active exploration and progress through the processes of assimilation and accommodation (Stephen, 2010).

Andrews (2012) claims that **Vygotsky** also valued play as the primary activity that shapes a child's development. Unlike Piaget, his views acknowledged that action and active learning create cognition and that other people (adults and children) participate in the process. As a social constructivist, he recognised the critical role of other people in the development of a cultural context and shared interests. He recognised the importance of close people assisting children in their play activities. Vygotsky valued play because he felt it enabled children to perform higher than they typically work.

Jerome Bruner is another seminal person in the cognitive-developmental theory. His notion of scaffolding is one of his several contributions to the knowledge of the evolution of play. For instance, when parents play with their infants, they frequently provide scaffolding to

enable their infants to participate. For example, maintaining their attention, presenting a specific "play" face, and speaking in a high-pitched voice—all of which help their infants perceive their play as play. Thus, play growth (and thus child development) is possible because more skilful play partners facilitate the development of play abilities (Scarlett *et al.* 2005).

According to Andrews (2012), **Parten's** play types represent a perceived development progression in children as they advance from lonely play to considerably more complex cooperative play. Moreover, her study found that their social and communication abilities improve as children grow, and solitary play becomes less prevalent.

Types of Parten's Play

Unoccupied- when a child is unoccupied, he or she is not engaged in play.

Solitary - the child plays alone, with no contact with others.

Onlooker - a child who is not participating in the play but observes it with curiosity.

Parallel - the child plays beside another child, perhaps mirroring words and motions without direct social connection.

Associative - the child is preoccupied with social connection with other children, taking precedence over play activities.

Cooperative – the child is engaged in both social connection and the task itself, and he or she can influence both spheres.

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